

February 16, 2017

Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, and honorable members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Caitlin Reese, and I am the Director of the Sexual Assault Crisis Service (SACS) at the YWCA New Britain. Our program offers assistance to sexual assault survivors and their loved ones. Our services include a 24-hour English and Spanish confidential hotline with immediate access to trained and certified counselors. We also provide individual crisis counseling, support groups, accompaniment through medical, police, and court procedures, campus advocacy, and prevention education. YWCA New Britain – SACS covers a 46-town region including all of Hartford county, part of Tolland county, and the town of Plymouth. Our program covers one of the largest territories in Connecticut. In fiscal year 2015-2016, we provided services to 600 sexual assault survivors.

SACS' campus advocacy and support includes responding to college student's requests for individual counseling, accompaniment throughout the adjudication process on campus, support groups, and prevention education for students and professionals. We participate in Sexual Assault Response Teams for colleges. These teams examine and improve policies and procedures related to the process of how disclosures are handled on campuses. We table and speak at Take Back the Night events to empower and support students. We play an active role in combatting rape culture as well as responding to the needs of college student survivors navigating the unique landscape of college campuses. Our particular center responds to 18 college campuses in our territory. Last year, PA 14-196 took effect, requiring K-12 schools in Connecticut to implement programming to educate students about sexual assault and abuse prevention strategies. This has been an exciting and challenging opportunity for SACS to meet the demands of supporting school systems across 46 towns.

SACS recognizes and appreciates the rape crisis line item increase in the Governor's budget two years ago. Unfortunately, we experienced a cut in funding from the Department of Public Health's Rape Crisis line item last year and continue to see decreases in funding from United Way and private foundations annually. Due to these cuts over the years, YWCA New Britain – SACS has operated programming on a restricted budget. We are proud to report that we have always responded to a victim's request for support but have served our clients with overworked and underpaid Advocates. Advocates deserve a livable wage. The burnout and secondary trauma experienced by workers in our field is overwhelmingly high. We are the first responders to trauma victims and require adequate resources to meet victim needs.

YWCA New Britain – SACS is respectfully requesting the Appropriations Committee to leave the rape crisis line item fully funded. Our program is rising to the challenge of supporting survivors and providing effective prevention programming to help end the prevalence of sexual assault in Connecticut. We know our work positively impacts and shapes the lives of survivors. YWCA New Britain – SACS evaluates our program through client questionnaires. We are proud to share the following outcomes:

- 100% of clients felt their Advocate was sympathetic and helped them understand the effects of trauma.
- 100% of clients were provided resources and safety planning.
- 100% of clients were assisted with access to appropriate medical care and felt they understood the criminal justice process with help from an Advocate.
- 100% of clients felt their Advocate helped them understand and/or manage their feelings.
- 100% of clients felt they benefited from receiving SACS services and would recommend the agency to someone in need of services.

Sexual assault can harm survivors emotionally, psychologically, and physically. Common effects from sexual assault include Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, flashbacks, substance abuse, suicide, self-

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harm, and sexually transmitted infections. We know that when survivors are given support and advocacy in their recovery process, they are in a better position to be able to manage these effects. YWCA New Britain – SACS remains committed in our mission to support survivors in our community.

We look forward to continuing to meet the needs of Connecticut residents affected by sexual assault with your support and partnership.

Sincerely,

Caitlin Reese, LMSW

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